

# Bold(her)

## The “End Times”: Challenging Ageism

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### **Lisa Bragg:**

Do you see getting older as an opportunity or something you fear?

‘Age provocateur’ Helen Hirsh Spence wants us all to reconsider how we think about growing older ourselves.. and how we consider the value of age.. all in this episode of Bold(h)er helping women make their next bold move.. brought to you by BMO for Women — I’m Lisa Bragg.

Helen, the title ‘age provacteur’ is great and I know you’re going to provoke some strong reactions on this show.. but how did you get so interested in addressing ageism and promoting age diversity in the workplace?

### **Helen Hirsh Spence:**

I don't think it was conscious at first, but I didn't realize that when I hit my mid-60s, I realized that I was not invited to speak as often or be engaged in conversations in the way in which I had been all my life, because I'd been in leadership positions. I realized that I was becoming more irrelevant, invisible, and I didn't know what was going on. I lost a lot of self-confidence. Then I started looking at other people around me and they were feeling the same way, especially women. I realized that this is actually internalized ageism.

I studied it. I went and did a whole lot of research on aging and ageism and realized that there were a variety of forms of ageism and that what I really was experiencing was self-directed or internalized ageism. In other words, I had internalized all these negative messages about getting older throughout my life without realizing their impact. Now research, because there's so many of us who are of a certain age now, in reference to the generation of boomers, who have pushed forward many of the reforms in the past, people are beginning to talk more about that and also menopause in ways in which they never did before.

### **Lisa Bragg:**

Let's talk about what internalized ageism means, because we just always think of the external voices, but that internalized ageism, tell me a little bit more what that feels like and looks like.

### **Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Internalized ageism looks like the self-talk that says "You're too old to do this, or "You can't start something new," because you're 65 or 70 or whatever. It looks like, "Oh, well, I can't do anything about my appearance, everybody sees me as ugly and wicked, and young children are afraid of me, or not necessarily afraid, but they think of me as being really old." Internalized ageism says that my knees hurt because I'm older, and the doctors reinforce that when in fact all I needed was a knee replacement and then I was fine again.

It's that kind of negative thinking about getting older. That's probably the reason why I have taken on this cause because I don't want younger generations to fear getting older the way in which my

generation did because it's really a force for good. It's really positive. It's really opportunity. It's creativity. It's an extension of all the power that you had earlier in life, just extended. People don't see it that way because it's had a really negative rap. Getting older is negative.

**Lisa Bragg:**

No matter what age, if you're starting to have that, I'm getting old, things are falling apart, I'm not productive. I'm not this and that. What kind of mantras or thinking do you have to help you get beyond that? Do you have any tips that we could use?

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Yes, for sure. I think first and foremost, we have to recognize it. Most of us are unconscious about the kind of ageism that we've internalized. If you think of it, I'm now 73, going on 74, I've had a lifetime, let's say, of consciousness from age 5 to my almost mid-70s where I've only heard negatives about getting older. It's not surprising that the older generations have experienced ageism for a longer period of time and have internalized those messages. You have to really become conscious of it. A typical example would be somebody who forgot where they put their keys would say, "Oh, I'm having a senior's moment." That's so typical.

Whenever I hear a friend say that I say, "Actually, that's not the case. Your brain's fine. 30-year-olds forget where they put their keys as well." It's that awareness that people need to become heightened to, and they're not. By talking about it with podcasts and emissions that talk about aging in a positive light, we're going to, out of necessity, change beliefs about aging. We really need role models, and there are lots of us out there who can be role models. That's actually why I named it Top Sixty Over Sixty, because that's something I hope to be able to do soon.

We need role models. We don't need millionaire role models who are 60s and 70s. We just need the extraordinary, ordinary individuals who are continuing to contribute meaningfully to their families, to their communities, to society. We need more of that in order to encourage people to change their thinking.

**Lisa Bragg:**

If we're thinking about our internal self, because that's what we can change faster, is that internal dialogue, making sure that I don't feel that invisibility, that corrosiveness of invisibility that we have, is it really being productive as much as you can and showing up and doing the things that make you feel vital and expressed in our society? Is there anything else that we can do in our internal monologues is what I'm looking for? Because we'll get to external in a second.

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Positive self-talk is really critical. In other words, I look in the mirror and I see, "Oh my goodness, it feels like I've put on some weight." I have to look and I have to say to myself, "Helen, you've gotten older. It's better to have a little bit more weight than less when you're older, because if you get sick and you lose, you're much more at risk of getting more sicker." Let's put it that way. You'll heal quicker if you are. Instead of saying, "Oh my God, how ugly have I become?"

The same thing with wrinkles and loss of hair. It's normal. It's part of the aging process. You just have to remember that this is okay and it's not negative. It's also beautiful in a different way. It's just that we have been so youth-focused as a society and we continue to be. We've been bombarded with messages about looking young, staying young, skin being young. A whole industry of health and skincare and hair care is dependent on us believing that we're not good if we're not young.

**Lisa Bragg:**

It can be subtle. Age bias can be subtle. Then it could be, as you said, it could be that you're not invited somewhere. It could be a snide dig. It could be so many things that end up that it's actually ageism. Everyone will encounter ageism at some point then, everyone.

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

It's just that people don't recognize it as such. It's referred to as everyday ageism. To use the terminology, there are little microaggressions such as you're sitting with a bunch of people and you happen to be the oldest person and they just turn their back to you and talk to the other people. Those are signals that they don't have the same respect for you or include you. That happens a lot at work. Just simple things. If you let your hair go gray, for instance, people might come up to you and say, "So when are you retiring?" They may not mean it unnecessarily harmfully.

If enough people say it to you, you begin to think, "Hmm, maybe I should retire," because there are a lot of older people who experience ageism in the workforce. They're very subtle hints that give you a feeling of old being negative. That's really what it is. Instead of seeing older as being experienced, mature, and valuable, we have been taught to believe that anything that's older is less positive. That is such a tragedy, especially at a time when the demographic is such that we are aging as a whole society and more people are over the age of 65 than under 14.

**Lisa Bragg:**

We have that whole wicked stepmother and wicked witch, all those things that we've all grown up with from reading childhood books to all the movies we see. We have that stereotype because often, while everyone will experience ageism, there's really gendered ageism that seems to be prevalent. It's so much focused, even at the age of, in your 40s, we start feeling that that gendered ageism.

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

According to all the studies done that women experiencing it, start experiencing gendered ageism at age 40 already, and that children at the age of 4 already have ageist beliefs. We have an uphill battle to fight. I hate to put it in war terms like fighting or dismantling and so on, but that's really what it is. It's just like all the other isms that have been tackled and haven't been eradicated yet. Ageism hasn't been touched at all. It's still socially acceptable in society.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Maybe because it's socially acceptable, we don't even know we're doing it. Let's have a little bit of a conversation around that. I'm going to say something that is, I know already wrong, and I'm going to put it there, but it's like, "Hey, Helen, you look great for your age." Wow. That's loaded and a backhanded compliment. Talk to me when people say that to you because you're gorgeous. What do people say? I know it's not ever about looks, but what do you say when people say that to you?

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

I have an answer to that right now. I'll say, "Lisa, you look great for your age too." People usually think, "Oh, hmm, maybe that wasn't what I should have said." If you just stopped at you look great and leave off for your age. Let's put in another ism. Let's talk about race. Would you ever say to somebody, you look good for being Black? That's when you realize that age is omitted from all the various diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies and practices. It's not included in 92% of them worldwide.

Age is intersectional. You can be old and you can be Black and you can be anything, old and gay, but you would never say to somebody, "You look good for being--" I'm just trying to think of another example other than gay, but there you go. "You look good for being gay." That's ridiculous.

**Lisa Bragg:**

That's shocking, actually. When you're saying it, I'm like, actually, it's a bit shocking to hear those statements because it's like, "Oh my goodness." When you put it that way, that shock value, because it does just roll in and out of your brain when it's about age, but when you put it in the terms that you did, I don't even want to repeat it. It feels so out of bounds.

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

We have to educate people because, as you said, when you introduce that phrase, people think it's a compliment. I think that many of us took it as a compliment until we realized that "What does my age look like?" That's ridiculous. What does any age look like? The other reality is as we age, we're more and more heterogeneous. You can't homogenize old people the way in which you might be able-- You can identify stages and aspects of toddlerhood. There are going to be a number of things that are similar. It doesn't apply when you hit older ages.

Because we've had more life experience, more time to develop in a variety of ways, so when you talk about generations of older people and you put them in one category, which is typically that of dependence, frailty, vulnerability, and I have to say that COVID and the pandemic just added to ageist beliefs by seeing as many people as we did in terrible, dire situations, you tend to think that everybody is like that. As I say, it's really about raising awareness, educating people so that they understand that little expressions like "You're over the hill," or "He's over the hill," or "She's too old to wear something like that. That's not age appropriate."

Those are the kinds of expressions you hear all the time. Why? Why can't you wear something that maybe has a shorter length than knee length? If your legs are good and you're 80, what the hell, right? Those are extremes. I'm not a fan of Martha Stewart being on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* because I think it objectifies women. It extends the objectification into their 80s. Good for her that she looks good, I'm happy for her, but I think that's the wrong example. Again, it's gotten conversations going, so I'm happy about that.

**Lisa Bragg:**

What are some other subtle ones that we may not realize that we're doing and saying that you could quash for us right now? Are there any others?

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Oh, we always hear things about older people and technology. For the most part, older people have invented that technology that we're all using today. The statistics show that there are more people using smartphones than ever before, especially since the pandemic. About 80% of people over the age of 65 are very tech-savvy, yet we assume that they aren't. Other examples would be when you meet older people, you tend to raise your voice and speak more slowly because you assume that they have a hearing impairment or something.

Now, that may be the case, but it certainly isn't true with everybody. It's especially common in the healthcare system. It's very, very demoralizing, to tell you the truth, and it's patronizing and infantilizing when you hear caregivers speaking to you as honey, sweetie, darling, or asking if your tummy hurts, or is it time for dinner now, by saying, "Ooh, are you getting hungry, sweetie?" There

are all sorts of things that we hear, especially in the healthcare system, that are really very damaging to a person's mental well-being.

The other thing is if you ever accompany an older person to see a health professional, they'll very often talk to you as the younger person rather than talking directly to the person who needs the care. I would say, "Well, my mother is perfectly capable of understanding what you're saying. Would you please direct your questions to her?" You have to say that all the time because people just make assumptions that your mental capacity is gone downhill.

The truth of the matter is we may process things differently, today we have crystallized intelligence as we get older. When we're young, we have what's known as fluid intelligence. However, we don't lose, our brains are wired differently and we have like a hard drive. Sometimes it's harder to access different things in the hard drive because it's full. That's what our brain is like. It takes a bit longer sometimes to process, but we're able to put things together in different ways.

I won't get into brain research because I'm not an expert, but I've done enough reading on it to feel good about my brain. I'm not afraid in the same way as I was before I started studying all of this about coming down with dementia. The other thing is the research is really conclusive that if you speak positively or you think positively about getting older and you have positive age beliefs, you will walk faster, you'll heal more quickly, you'll live longer. It's amazing how a positive mindset will impact your well-being as you age. If there's any positive message that I hope people will leave with, it will be, "You can do something about your mental and physical well-being simply by thinking differently about getting older."

**Lisa Bragg:**

Ooh, that's very good. That gives us hope for a lot of things.

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

It gives young people hope too, I think.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Because there are the stereotypes that older workers are less flexible and poor health, as you've mentioned, maybe less creative, less trainable than younger workers. That, "Why wouldn't you have taken Freedom 55?" A lot of us grew up with a lot of those ads of "You should be retired by the time you're 55. If you're really successful, you're retired by that age." That's ridiculous for so many of us on so many levels for financial stability, considering how long we live nowadays, and also the fact that we want to be productive for all of our decades. When you hear these stereotypes and they wear you on, how do you keep going? How do you keep moving forward?

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

I know enough now about the longevity dividend that we have. By that, I'm talking about the fact that we're living that much longer than our parents and grandparents did. We're living about 30 years longer than our parents did, in fact. That is not just tacked on to the end of life, but people have not understood yet that we are living longer lives. That Freedom 55 was probably the best marketing that was ever done because everybody refers to it. It's so unrealistic. Today a child born will have an average lifespan of 100 years. An average lifespan. They believe that the first child who's going to be 150 has already been born. Imagine that.

If your average lifespan is 100, people in their 20s and 30s today are going to be working into their

70s and 80s as a norm, but they're not going to be doing things in the same order. It's not just learn, earn, and retire. It's going to be learn, earn, learn, gap year, learn. Things are going to be very different. It's going to be lifelong learning in a new and different way. Universities and our society has to adapt to that. People are not talking about it enough, but the new map of life is the 100-year life. You at 50 are in midlife. You're not at the end of your life, so it would be damaging to you actually to stop working in a few years.

Here's the reality, many people of my generation and other generations really do think that retirement at 55 or 65 is what they're aiming for. The reality is that when they hit that age and they're out of the work for a period of time, they often want to return because their whole social network revolved around work and the people with whom they worked. People need to be socially engaged as they get older. They need it for cognitive stimulation. It doesn't have to be the same work necessarily. It can be totally different, but people need to be stimulated.

Then, of course, probably the most stunning reason is that financially there are fewer and fewer people who can save for a lengthened period of time when they're going to be alive as certainly not in the wonderful state that they lived in perhaps during their 40s and 50s. We see all the traditional milestones being shoved upward now. We see children staying at home much longer as the norm after they go to college or university. We see people not able to find jobs for longer periods of time. They don't have the security that they had.

We're going to see a return, at least I hope we will, but I think it's already starting, the multi-generational households again, where there might be granny suites, where older family members come and help take care of the young children. We're seeing remote work so that mothers or fathers can remain at home or they can share the responsibilities in different ways. Everything is shifting. Look at marriage. People are not getting married as young as they used to, if they get married at all. Most women, if they have careers, are having children much later. We're living longer and we don't have the security.

There isn't the loyalty to employees that I knew or my parents knew as a generation. There isn't the loyalty or commitment of people to their organizations. It goes both ways. It's not like young people are being-- They're moving for reasons. For good reasons very often.

**Lisa Bragg:**

We're starting to have conversations about menopause, which was a taboo topic just a few years ago. We're starting to have those conversations. Those are particular for people who are 48 to 55 generally, but you want us to push older and have conversations about older ages than that, right? What do you think about this menopause though, as part of the conversation with where you sit and your lens?

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Oh, I think it's wonderful. I think the fact that men are being made to realize what it's like or to acknowledge how it impacts women is really important. I would caution you. Perimenopause is as terrible as menopause. That often starts in your 30s. I think that people need to be really aware of menopause. I remember that when I was in my early 40s, late 30s, I didn't know anything about perimenopause. Nobody talked about it, but I read a book by Gail Sheehy called *The Silent Passage*. That was the best book I ever read on the subject because nobody talked about it. I'm trying to think that would be 25 years ago, or 30 years ago at this point. My point being, I didn't know. I didn't know that what I was experiencing was actually perimenopause and then menopause and how it affects everybody differently. There has to be allowance for that too. Again, it affects

everybody differently. Again, it's an educational period. There's something called andropause too that we never talk about. That's what happens to men. You didn't know about that?

**Lisa Bragg:**

I don't even know what that means. Can you enlighten us?

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Yes. It's menopause for men, testosterone levels and whatnot go down. There are changes as well. You see men who are losing their hair, they're going bald. I'm not an expert, but I know for a fact that andropause exists but we don't talk about it as much either.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Yes. I think I understood that in some of the research I was doing for those podcasts because a lot of, with all the intersectionalities, but men face as they get older, ageism too, where they're, according to some of the studies, not as seen as likable where women, as they age, start to see sometimes seem more likable because they're seen more maternal grandmother-like, which is also then, we're also having a conversation about the wicked witch and the wicked stepmother. It's all, how does this all play in? The men were being reported as more aggressive and less enjoyable to work with. I think what it really comes down to is everyone is different-

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

That's right.

**Lisa Bragg:**

-and all this intersectionality really does play into it. Now, you made a comment when we were talking before in the pre-interview about age-siloing and that we've been age-siloing for far too long. That's where we talk about Gen Z and then we have the Millennials, which everyone maligned for so long. Then we have the unknown Gen Xers. Then we have the boomers. Then we have the Silent Generation. We have all these things but talk to me a little bit more about age siloing because that's a term we should probably learn.

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Yes. It's age siloing or age segregation. I'd say that the 20th century was the most age-segregated time in history because prior to that, we'd have one-room schoolhouses and children between the ages of 6 and 18 would be in the same classroom. Then with the advent of automobiles and buses and going from rural to industrial society, that all changed. All of that happened late 1800s, early 1900s. Also, the rights of children and we shouldn't exploit children, all of which is great, but as a result of that, we started to have different grades of children in schools.

We came up with retirement. 1935, I think is the date of the Social Security Act, but it was Bismarck in the late 1800s who talked about leaving work. Let's just look at the 1930s. At that time, the average age span was 62 and so 65 retirement was a reward for living that long. All of that has changed, but nothing has changed in our society. Going back to the question about age segregation, we saw families living together before. Now we are siloing off older generations into care homes and to senior residences, long-term care.

In some cultures, that's unheard of and it would be shameful. That's still true in many cultures, but in North America, and I'm really referring to North America here, we've done a great job of pushing people aside as they get older and making them less important because we've done it to ourselves.

The same thing with, I remember, senior communities where there are no children allowed. I think, "Really?" There's nothing better than intergenerational connection. That's the only way we're going to really get over ageism, is when we see the commonalities that we share, the values that we share. What differentiates the generations more than anything else is just the time in which we were born and the influences that were apparent at that time. For the '60s and '70s, for me, it would have been civil rights, Vietnam, feminism in a big way. Those things really influenced me and my thinking. My daughter who is a Millennial has the good fortune of having the maternity rights that I never had, but I fought for. We'll see that generation perhaps as taking it for granted. Of course, they're going to take it for granted, because it's been the norm for them.

I think if we get beyond some of those things, we'll see that we have a lot more in common than we have differences. Again, we need to recreate what was once the norm, which is the multigenerational lives that we used to have because it was healthy for everybody. It's good for little children to be around older people. Older to a little child is 10 when they're 5, right?

Of course, I'll be old to my grandchildren, but when they say that and they say it often, I say, "So who takes you skiing? Who takes you up on the lift and comes down with you?" "You do." "Okay. Who takes you swimming out in the river?" "Well, you do." I said, "Who else does?" "Nobody." I said, "Yes, so what am I too old for? Or why am I old?" I just challenged them. I say, "You're right, I am old and I'm lucky to be old and I'm happy I'm old. Because I'm old, I have the privilege of seeing things with a different lens and through various perspectives."

I think that's what differentiates getting older to young because-- That's why there are so many suicides among young people, I think, because they don't see beyond the moment. Whereas older people have experienced sadness, tragedy, sickness, joy, and we realize that everybody is going to go through these different stages at different times in their life and it's part of life. To your point before, when you said that women tend to be nicer as they get older, it's true, but men also. They lose their ego because they've done that, especially women, they've been there, they've done that. They don't need to prove anything anymore.

As they get older, they get a bit more humble, less egotistical. That's true of men as well, most of the time, but not always. They're more forgiving and less judgmental. That's one of the really great joys of getting older is thinking back on what I thought of somebody and now I think, "Why was I so unkind," or "Why was I so judgmental about that?" It's just living through a hard time or something. It's really a great time in life. If you ask anybody as they get older, even really 70s, 80s, 90s, they wouldn't turn back time for anything. That's if they're in good health, Lisa. If their health span doesn't match their lifespan, they're in trouble. We're all in trouble.

### **Lisa Bragg:**

I have this quote that I love, unfortunately, I don't have it at the tip of my fingertips right now, but it's from Gloria Steinem. She says about how we pass our torch and we're expected after a certain age, probably 40, to pass our torch to the next generation. She says in it, "No, I'm not passing my torch. I'm going to light the torch of others so that when we have more light, we can truly see our way." That's just me totally paraphrasing it and getting it wrong. How do we encourage the light of others so that they join us on the journey?

### **Helen Hirsh Spence:**

I think that it will be easier for future generations, quite frankly. If I think of myself and how challenging it was for me to become a secondary school principal in the public system when it was dominated by



men, I was just reflecting on that the other day. I'm in Ottawa. I remember when I was qualified but a superintendent tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Oh, Helen, you'll be appointed soon. Don't worry about it." I was 45 at that particular point. I looked at him, I said, "That's right, Mike. You were 23 and you hadn't taught more than a year and you were a principal in the elementary system. You're telling me that at my age I should be patient? I'm sorry."

That's typical of what women encountered in my generation. I think that we had to fight a lot harder. We also became more competitive among ourselves, which was dangerous. It was the antithesis of what needed to happen, but I think that that's changed. I think it's changing. I think women are realizing that the more women that can participate at senior levels, the better it is for everyone. I certainly subscribe to that. I've always been really keen on mentoring other women in particular, not only in my profession but just generally speaking, so that they understand that they are capable of doing what they want and what they believe in and they definitely need assistance.

They need more than allies. They need more than mentors. They need sponsors. I think that's what's different today. I think we're understanding that. I also see the evidence in boards of directors and leaders in countries. Those countries are dealing with issues in very different ways. I really firmly believe that if women are at the table and diversity is at the table, and I'm talking generally speaking, all different representations of individuals, that we have a much better chance at doing the right thing, the best thing, and the valued thing, and what's good for everyone.

I see that. I see that regularly when I participate in discussions on boards. At the same time, we can't neglect the fact that there are also young men who are being disadvantaged now because of the gender perception and trying to push forward. I lived through the civil rights movement. I remember very well, young Black women and men, getting into colleges and universities and people saying, "Well, they weren't qualified." They weren't as qualified as me or something like that.

They may not have been, but it was necessary for role modeling that those people got there so that they could demonstrate to future generations that you too can be a doctor or a lawyer. Until then, they weren't. It's the same thing with women in positions of responsibility. Fortunately, gender is intersectional just like age is. I really am a firm believer in the multi-generational workforce. Having been an educator, I always worked with children, with their parents, with staff, with superintendents, every age group possible. It wasn't a stretch at all. It was the norm and it should continue.

It should be the norm in every workforce because the skills and the complementarity that we have because of the different times in life when we grew up is only greater richness for a business, for a company, for a community, for a board, for whatever. I think I got off track completely from the question you asked. Gendered age, I just want to say that men balding with beer bellies and whatnot are considered distinguished and women who let their hair go gray are invisible.

We saw that certainly with Lisa LaFlamme, not that I'm suggesting for a moment that she was let go because of her hair. I'm sure it was ageism included, but it must've been a lot more than that.

Nonetheless, that illustrates. Just recently I said to somebody, "Why aren't you saying what your age is?" She said to me, "Because I'll lose my job and that's why I dye my hair and continue to pretend that I'm younger than I am." I said, "What do you mean you'll lose your job?" She said, "I'll age out. They'll find a reason to move me on." It's true, they will, because gendered ageism is a reality and unfortunately it affects women in a way.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Do you think the penalty though then is so high for too many of us to actually then go that route? What do we do? It's one of those things, we can't wait to change things for the next generation. So often we say, "Let's help the next generation." Meanwhile, this is going on right now with our peers and the people who are 40 to all the way up. We can't wait. We can't wait for the next generation. We need to do something right now at least.

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

I agree. I think that it would be really powerful if everybody would come out and say how old they were, for instance. As I say, age is not a determinant of skill or competency, yet we've likened it to that by saying that if you're older, you're no good anymore. If you found out that a lot of your senior management were older perhaps, and they admitted it and talked about it and the benefits of it, maybe in corporations and whatnot, everybody said, "Well, I'm 57," and "I'm 63," maybe people wouldn't be as frightened and it would start a movement of really undermining the age bias that exists especially in businesses and big corporations.

I would say from my experience with friends and whatnot in banks and insurance companies, they suffer the most. They hurt inside because they're constantly trying to deceive the general public about their age because they're afraid, they're fearful that they'll be eliminated. Now, the older men don't get eliminated as readily, but older women certainly do.

**Lisa Bragg:**

We have a wide-range of listener ages in our audience.. is there anything you'd say to our younger listeners?

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Embrace aging.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Is there anything you'd like to say to your generation?

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Yes. Accept aging and be a part of the movement to discourage age bias. If we don't speak out now, future generations aren't going to benefit the way in which they've benefited from feminism and civil rights movements and anti-war and so on and so forth. It's been our generation that's moved the dial on a number of things. Yes, it's been hard for us, but I don't resent the fact that young women are having advantages that I didn't have because I fought for them for that reason.

Sure, I would have loved to have not lost my job when I had my first child or had to give it up or whatever, or go back to work, which is what I did, unfortunately, but I'm delighted that my grandchildren have both parents accessible to them for the first months of their lives. We're finding out how important that is. I think we all need to embrace aging. We need to make age aspirational as far-- If I had a motto or a logo, it should be, be proud of your wrinkles and accept the fact that aging has a different type of beauty to it.

We need to explore what that is because we've hidden it for so long. The conversations are so rich when we get among other generations and other age groups. It's like endless learning. It excites me to work with all of you who I know are younger than me. I have lots of friends who are older than me. If I had advice to give anyone, it would be, ensure that you have friends of all generations because if

you only have friends that are the same age as you, when we start losing them, which happens, we're going to be left alone and won't have anybody to talk to. I think that's really important too.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Helen, how can people work with you?

**Helen Hirsh Spence:**

Oh, it would be my delight to work with businesses and companies. We have tools and training to help with age diversity, which isn't included in diversity strategies as I said, helping them bring teams together in the multi-generational workforce. I also work a lot with coaching individuals who are getting older in groups courses or individually, to help them identify how they're sabotaging themselves sometimes as they get older, help them find purpose in their lives as they move forward, and recognize the positives about getting older. It's a real struggle for people because they've been brainwashed their whole lives that it isn't a positive thing.

I also work with people who are looking for work once again. My business is called Top Sixty Over Sixty. I speak at conferences and do workshops and training. It's always a joy because every time I speak to an audience, there are so many ahas that it makes it worthwhile. They realize, "Oh my goodness, I am ageist." I know I'm ageist. If I see a little old lady driving a car badly, I'll say, "Oh, it's a little old lady," then I have to smack myself and think, that's who I am.

What we do is we other old people, even when we're older ourselves sometimes. We're our own worst enemies. I really do believe that older people are the ones who sometimes perpetuate ageism without realizing it, because they're the ones saying, "Oh, I'm losing it because I'm older," or "This hurts because I'm older," and dismissing all the benefits of age.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Thank you so much for your wisdom on this today. I appreciate it.

**Helen:** Oh, my pleasure.

**Lisa Bragg:**

If you want to find out more about Helen and her company, check out her website at Top Sixty over Sixty dot com. Tune in for our next episode..

Our next episode is with Deland Kamanga, a bold ally working to improve the workplace for all women.

I'm Lisa Bragg.. and this is Bold(h)er - helping women make their next bold move.. brought to you by BMO for Women

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